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BACKGROUND: SEARS ON BISCAYNE BOULEVARD

The former Sears, Roebuck and Co. department store on Biscayne Boulevard is significant as a reflection of architectural style and commercial development in Miami during the late 1920s.

Built in 1929, the store is one of the earliest and finest examples of art deco-style commercial architecture in the Miami area, predating the art deco buildings on Miami Beach by several years. The building is particularly noteworthy for its straight-forward expression, applied ornamentation, central tower, and massing.

The design of the building, together with its prominent location on Biscayne Boulevard, has made the store a landmark. Ever since its opening, the building has been an impressive part of the Miami skyline and remains the "gateway" building on Biscayne Boulevard to uptown Miami.

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A Matter of Philosophy

Designed by the prominent Chicago architectural firm of Nimmons, Carr and Wright, the building is typical of the many stores which the firm designed for Sears. It also reflects the firm's philosophy in the design of these stores. The firm's choice of "modern" design to express the form and proportion of the entire composition and its parts is particularly successful in the store on Biscayne Boulevard.

The Biscayne store exhibits many of those design features common to Sears stores during this period. Foremost among these is the central tower, a trademark of Sears. Other important features include the pronounced verticality of the building, emphasized by engaged fluted piers, and the variety of applied art deco ornamental detailing, highlighting important features of the building.

The general contractor was Harrison Construction Company of Miami. The four-story building features a seven-story tower placed at a 45-degree-angle on its southeast corner. The construction is reinforced concrete with a smooth stucco surface. The building was expanded in 1934 and 1958.

Shaping Miami

The opening of the Sears store on Biscayne Boulevard in 1929 marked the culmination of efforts by the Biscayne Boulevard Company to establish a new shopping area for Greater Miami.

BACKGROUND -- Add 2

This type of business development was unparalleled in the city's history. Plans for Biscayne Boulevard called for a complete shopping center, with developers recognizing the increasing importance of the automobile and planning for it.

This was the deciding factor in Sears decision to locate its new retail store here. Officials stated that although the Boulevard was far removed from downtown Miami, customers would drive their cars to get to the store. Therefore, the abundance of parking spaces was of prime importance in the selection of a location. In basing its decision on such a factor, Sears foreshadowed the course of development in Miami for the next several decades.

From its opening in 1929, the Sears store was cited for excellence. During opening ceremonies, Mayor C. H. Reeder of Miami referred to the new store as "the finest store in the South." The store was also pictured in several national architectural journals. The May 1933 issue of The Architectural Forum featured the store as one of "eight modern department stores."

Sears History in Miami

Sears opened its first store in south Florida in 1928 in a four-story-building at 835 West Flagler St. The success of the store and a careful survey of the community by the company prompted Sears to open the larger retail department store on Biscayne Boulevard.

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BACKGROUND -- Add 3

Built at a cost of \$750,000, the store was Sears 33rd in the South and the third in Florida. Its opening was proclaimed by a special eight-page supplement in the Miami Daily News. As a result, more than 6,000 people visited the store during the first two hours it was open.

Today Sears has 17 stores in southeastern Florida in Broward, Dade and Palm Beach counties. Throughout the state Sears, Roebuck and Co. has 50 retail stores, plus specialty stores and distribution and service centers. Including its subsidiaries, the company employs more than 29,000 associates in merchandising, insurance, financial services and real estate.